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ABSTRACT

Organization Development (OD), conceived by behavioral scientists to humanize psychological aspects of working conditions which deprive employees of opportunities to develop and utilize their inherent resources, is based on the assumption that human resources can be released if people are given other conditions for work and cooperation. There is no uniform theory or practice, but five areas must be considered for perfect OD, presupposing economic and political conditions encouraging to optimal terms for the organization's internal conditions: (1) Human relationships, or, the cooperation mission. It is naive to start cooperation training without changing the methods by which the leaders have been selected and trained to be competitive and ruthless. (2) Production technology, or, tool modification--largely a question of manipulating "the world of things." An entire industrial culture will have to be eradicated first. (3) Organizational structure, or, flexible work divisions. This issue is inevitably ideological and political. (4) Organizational ideology. For OD, the underlying ideology is person-oriented, the welfare state's breakthrough in the working life. (5) Relationship with external environment. Many believe OD is impossible without extensive changes in society. OD means action which secures for all members of an organization adequate terms for sound and all-round cooperation (participation). (Author/AJ)

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ONCE AGAIN: WHAT IS ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT?

by Arne Ebeltoft

With excessive use, popular key concepts will lose their value as a guidance. This appears to be happening to the term organization development - to such an extent that some people with a sense of order and system have suggested that it should be abolished. I have personally, in a short time, seen the term applied to general personnel training, sensitivity training where people learn to tolerate touching one another, typical technical system planning, goal analyses, in brief a little of everything that they are occupied with in industrial concerns at present. You often get the impression that they want to dress up good old tools by adding the word development to them. Supervisor courses are now called "management development" and training of personnel "personnel development". Even familiar tools from the torture chamber of the rationalization technology are being launched as cure-all remedies when the word development is added. And "organization development" comes in handy then. Please help yourself. The risk is that organization development could become a way to bully people on the pretext that it is to their own good, they will be "developed". But what is actually organization development?

The origin

The OD concept was created a decade ago by behavioral scientists who were preoccupied with humanizing the working conditions, particularly their psychological aspects. Psychologists have always been absorbed by studies of human development and what happens when the development is retarded or has gone astray. The whole clinical psychology, which

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in our country has been predominant in the practical activity of psychologists, aims to help children and adults to find their way to a sound development. And this means looking for the causes of lacking development. And that is where the spotlight has been turned on working conditions, inter alia.

The criticism against the organizations - i.e. companies, schools, departments, hospitals etc. - has largely been that they deprive the employees of opportunities to develop and utilize their inherent resources. What kind of resources?

The easiest way to observe the development of resources is to follow people from childhood to adult and see what happens or at any rate might happen to them:

- Children have small while adults may have great capacity for initiative and self-determination.
- Children are dependent on others, at the beginning extremely dependent, but as adults they are relatively independent.
- Children are capable of few things, adults of many things.
- Children have only sporadic, unstable and superficial interests. Adults can have enduring and deep interests and ability to feel that an issue has value per se and to act and adapt their lives accordingly.
- Children have a short time perspective, adults can see and plan over a longer term.
- Children adopt a subordinate role, adults can adopt an egalitarian or superior role.
- Children have little feeling of identity, adults may have great insight of self and a strong feeling of identity.
- Children have a limited capacity for understanding others and feeling fellowship, adults are capable of seeing the inter-relation between their own life and the life of others and feeling fellowship and solidarity.

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Mature "developed" adult persons are those who have been in a position to utilize these resources. Immature, "undeveloped" adults have only been able to utilize them sporadically and to a limited degree. That is the difference between health and ill health, between being liberated and oppressed, whether the obstructions lie within oneself or have been caused by things in the environment.

The resources are innate in all of us, but we know that everyone does not have equal chance to develop them and use them. Nevertheless these are resources which are essential if complicated systems of cooperation such as modern organizations are to function. And not merely function, but for the good of all of us. The labor-management organizations - big and small - dominate our community today and mark our existence to a high degree. And it is quite natural that we should subject their impact and influence on us to critical scrutiny.

The critics - and they are numerous - maintain, for example, that hundreds of thousands of jobs require that the incumbent function like a child rather than an adult human being. The job makes these people unsure of themselves, because goals, content, methods and performance evaluation are determined by others than the incumbent. The job is learnt in a few days or weeks. When the slightest doubt arises the foreman must be consulted. The contact with others does not develop self-knowledge, except the feeling of being a powerless person in a rather meaningless job.

Such alienation is not restricted to the lower ranks. The jobs at the top may also prove disastrous. They can give us a power whereby we learn to be ruthless with the persons under us. Under the pressure of onesided technological-economic training and work many executives do not even get the information they need in order to show consideration for their subordinates. One of the consequences is that they are instrumental in creating jobs of the nature described

in the foregoing. The nature of an executive job very often permits the incumbents to be unbelievably blind to the effects of their own exercise of power and out of contact with the persons they are assigned to supervise. The nature of the job and the organizational systems that surround it tend to impoverish the executive as regards human insight and reduce him as a leader in the actual sense.

However, it would be a mistake to think that absence of development opportunities makes people dissatisfied. Some times yes, other times no. An environmental expert has put it this way: "It is unbelievable how much pollution and dirt people can get used to. That is what is so terrible and tragic". It is possible to get used to, to "adapt yourself to" psychologically poor and polluted environments. But as a rule the adaptation has its price. Indifference, short-sightedness, lack of initiative, competitive spirit and intrigues, in big or smaller doses we have come to accept this as "natural" ingredients at our workplaces. Like exhaust smell, polluted water and noise. The human resources that exist are being misused rather than used, exploited rather than developed.

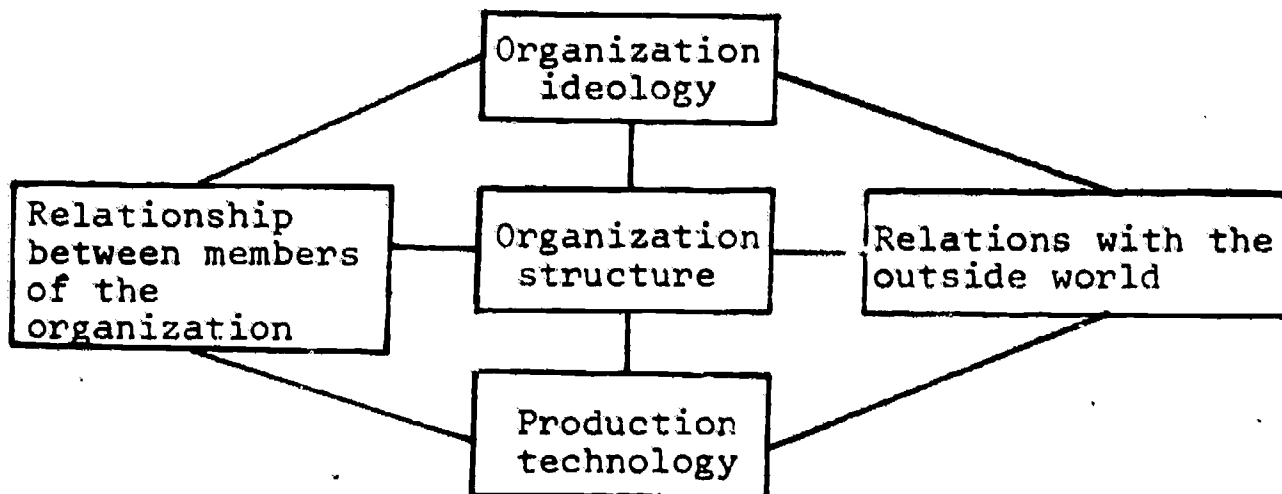
Dimensions of Causes, Degrees of Solutions

Organization development is thus based on the assumption that many good, human resources could be released - to the benefit of the individual as well as the organization - if people in general were given other conditions for work and cooperation. But there exists no uniform theory or established practice for this line. In that respect the situation may be compared with the situation in medicine as regards cancer: We know something about the causes of growth of cancer cells, we know something about the ways the body reacts or fails to react to this growth, we know certain remedies, but have no satisfactory theoretical explanation, no secure treatment. But that does not prevent efforts being made to get closer

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to the truth and find the solution.

Organizations are complex open systems. Many factors, not least external, determine what the end result will be for the individual employee. To simplify the factors let me point out five areas which must be taken into consideration when the organization shall be developed. These factors appear in the figure below, and the lines indicate that none of them can be seen isolatedly.



A perfect organization development will have to take into consideration and do something about all these five areas. In practice this virtually never happens. It would require economic and political conditions in a country which - to the extent the country can do this isolatedly - would encourage optimal terms for internal conditions in the individual concern, service, school etc. Instead, we see that the factors which I have mentioned are attacked singly, often with rather poor effect. Let us discuss them in their proper turn.

Human Relationships

Under the name of organization development this is the area which has received most attention in terms of number of activities, number of books and number of persons in fulltime jobs working in the field. Quite reasonably, the key personnel of an organization, i.e. high level personnel,

are being trained with a view to ensure greater consideration for the employees. It is hoped that these leaders may become more open, more considerate, that they will gain greater selfinsight and become more alert to how people feel, briefly - more understandable and friendly toward others. With a somewhat disparaging term we might call this approach the "cooperation mission". A number of varied methods and plans have this in common that they aim to make people more cooperative. Cooperation councils are established, meetings and conferences arranged, people are being taught to communicate, to be good team members, to understand their effect on others etc. The missionary overtone may often be attributed to a very obvious urge on the part of advocates of this policy to "save" people from conflicts, isolation and distrust and from aggression and struggle, all of which is considered not too good, and often sinful. (As a psychologist working in the field I have personally been accused by colleagues and clients of being hot-tempered and critical - a somewhat disheartening example of the opposite of what I stand for professionally.)

My slightly ironical description of this policy is due to the fact that its representatives on the whole never attempt to delve deeply into or doing something about the conditions which have made leaders and others lacking in insight, inconsiderate and unfriendly. For it is of course naive to start meetings and training without changing the methods by which the leaders have been selected and trained into what they are today. (A scientist such as C. Argyris maintains, for example, that leaders of big firms are competitive and ruthless, without mentioning the economic and political climate in which these leaders operate, "explaining" instead their behavior as lack of "cooperation competence". Argyris 1971). Instead, there is a strong tendency to personify both causal explanations and training methods, with help from clinical psychology and psychologists on the basis of their tradition and approach to delicate emotional problems. At best, they have managed to melt some ice wall or other,

One reason for the response this "cooperation mission" has met with is that it is relatively simple and cheap/ It is easy to fit into current education, in and outside the plants, it requires only limited commitment, it gives a semblance of political neutrality and dovetails with societies where they strive to coordinate, harmonize and integrate personnel and other production factors.

Production Technology

Production technology is in the focus of organization development as a result of a growing understanding that the degree of job satisfaction, the organizing of the work and the facilities that are available are central determinants for what the individual gets out of his working life. The work determines which talents (resources) will be utilized, the relationship with others (status, cooperation), one's past and future. We can only employ our resources to the extent our work requires them. Instead of analyzing how people treat each other in meetings, one will analyze how the job are treating them. In good accordance with a materialistic philosophy of life, by the way. We could call this aspect of organization development "tool modification", as it is largely a question of manipulating the "world of things" and not people, and of modifications, not dramatic changes. (Engelstad, 1970).

While it is self-evident that the nature of the work determines what we develop and utilize of our own resources, it is not easy to work out alternative methods with this in view. Both the analysis methods and change procedures seem elaborate and time-consuming in comparison with the methods applied by the "cooperation mission". (For example, Shell in England sent 300 executives and workers representatives through a 2-3 day conference over a period of six months, but it took nearly one and a half years to analyse the conditions in a division and introduce a job-oriented program

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for organization development there. Hill 1971). Furthermore, the relatively few people who are active on this front appear to have to fight whole armies of bureaucrats and rationalization people follow the exact opposite line. The procedure to change people's jobs is also slow because most of the jobs in an organization form an interwoven network where the job description for one job determines the description for related jobs. Workers in dull, narrow and meaningless jobs as a rule have leaders in supervisory, challenging and satisfactory jobs. A better job for the worker could lead to reduced privileges for the executives on decision making level, who among other things decide whether to engage in organization development or not. And wolves watching sheep are not known for their generosity. They eat the sheep themselves.

It might be easier, then, to test fresh procedures for organizing the work in new plants, hospitals and schools. (Walton, 1973. Hem. 1970).

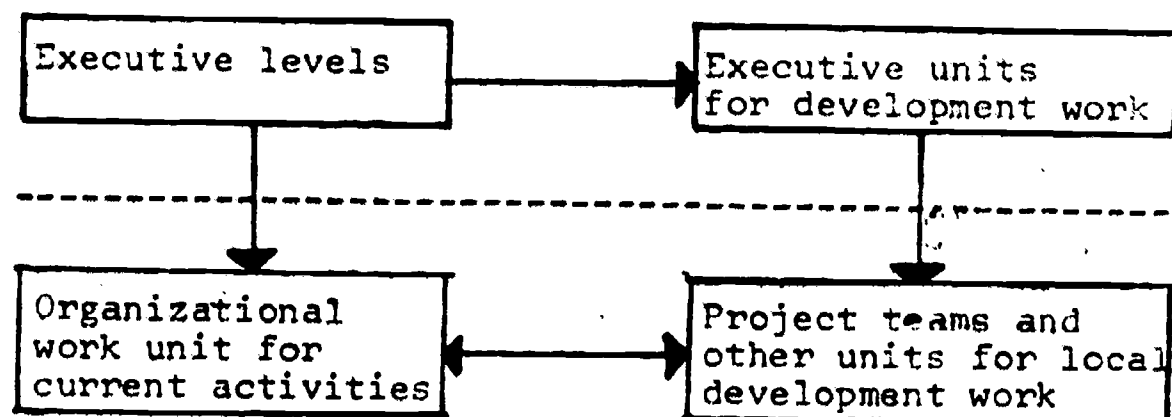
The confusion in the conflict between old and new ways of thinking of jobs will apparently be prolonged puberty crises. It is as though an entire industrial culture will have to be eradicated first.

Organization Structure

The structure of an organization is its constitution. It indicates the division (fair and unfair) of authority and responsibility, rights and duties, status and power, and ownership. It follows that the organization structure is a determinant for the position that the individual can take up and how his human resources can be given full scope. Where organization development has reached the point where it restructures the organization decisively it could be appropriate to apply the term "structure-humanization". In that case, organization development may have two effects. One is the effect on the power structure, the other the

effect on change procedure. Organizations under pressure for change tend to begin taking greater interest in employee performance than in keeping everyone nicely in their place. Bureaucracy is replaced (or supplemented) by matrix organizations. The term matrix means bringing people together in working groups which cut horizontally across the normal functional-pyramidal organization. Project teams (or "task forces") usually consist of egalitarian members assigned to solve a particular task in a manner which require free use of resources - without a side glance on status, roles and rigid procedures. The effect is often that persons with know-how and ability get a chance in a flexible way, where the regular cast system may permit mediocre performance so long as the work is done by the "right" person.

Such flexible divisions of work naturally increase the ability to meet new situations. But direct development activity also thrives under these open structures and organization development is virtually unthinkable without them. Change and development tasks require methods for the organizing of work which permit people to be unconventional, daring and committed. And since organization development aims to give people control of their own work situation as far as possible, the groups who promotes it will not only be privileged staff specialists but the same people who shall reap the fruits of the development work. The idea is to train the capabilities of every employee to shape his own workplace continually so that this and those who now "own" it will have a concordant and simultaneous development. Something like this:



For example, the units below the dotted line could be people in a production section, shop etc. who carry out the normal work. But as indicated by the "box" they also form project teams, have committees and meetings with a view to change and improve the general working conditions, perhaps with the assistance of an expert from a central division.

Gulowsen (1971) has pointed out that there is a fundamental difference between the type of participation which is built into systems with autonomous groups and the participation due to delegation and "democratic" executives. Whereas the latter is a kind of democracy granted as a favor, the former is democracy based on law. (How solid this basis is may naturally vary according to authority, competence and nature of work technology). In practice, organization development will embody both types. One may say that American-inspired systems are more in favor of the voluntary delegation from the executive, while the growing European prefer the constitutional basis on which participation is built. The latter is reflected in our agreements and laws on industrial democracy and in the experiments with self-ruled groups that are in progress.

When it is called organization "development" and not simply change, this in reality infers that the organization has been shifted from a lower to a more advanced state. Is it more advanced, then, that jobs stimulate people to more all-round effort, that people take greater part in management, that cooperation is more efficient, that human needs are satisfied to a greater degree?

We might just as well ask whether democracy is more advanced than dictatorship (in the sense that the people there function better). There are many answers to that question, if not in theory at any rate in practice. The question can not be answered scientifically or "objectively", even though many are found of saying that organization development is behavior science put into effect. The issue is ideological and political - inevitably.

Organization Ideology

This brings us to an area which very much has preoccupied champions for organization development. A great deal of the training relating to organization development can not be characterized as anything but ideological influence. But the presentation often conceals the ideological aspect - the discussion concerns understanding of human nature, techniques and theoretical models instead. What's in a name?

Ideological classifications are legion. Harrison (1972) identifies four distinct organization ideologies, as a summing up of a number of other experiments. Their names are power-orientation, role-orientation, task-orientation and person-orientation.

The power-oriented ideology favors organizations dominated by a small but strong leader group. In common usage this might be called "company fascism". The executives are regarded as a particularly talented elite with the right to cope with business transactions, production and manpower completely in their own brilliant ways.

The role-oriented ideology fits the needs of bureaucracy, still dominated by its leaders, but also under considerable restraint - in the form of rules, regulations and procedures. Everyone has his specific place, his role, in a sort of class and cast system supported by skills. Whereas the power-oriented ideology belongs in a dangerous power struggling and competitive world, the role-orientation fits secure and stable social conditions - a steady course.

The task-oriented ideology sweeps everything aside in the interests of getting on with the job. The organization is adapted to what is most expedient from a work point of view. People are transferred, positions are set up and abolished, personnel who have something to contribute get a chance, others are finished. Performance greed permeates the system, while the organization is none too considerate

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as regards other human needs. Its strength is naturally the capacity of such organization to mobilize the resources for everchanging goals.

The person-oriented ideology is usually the exact opposite of the other three. While people there are looked upon as the organization's tools, the organization becomes the tool of the people in the person-oriented ideology. The firm may even be dissolved when it no longer serves the personal needs of the members. A job is supposed to give personal fulfillment, opportunities for growth. Authority is exercised only when it is absolutely necessary.

It is difficult to explain the underlying ideology for organization development and its wide acceptance as anything but a desire to move away from power- and person-oriented organizations toward task- or person-oriented. In that respect organization development does not exist in a social vacuum. It is rather the welfare state's breakthrough in the working life, an attempt to achieve there something of what they have succeeded in doing outside. And it is clear that it will be difficult in the longer term for companies, hospitals and schools to maintain their public-spirited image outwardly unless this eventually has effects internally. Automobile plants can not produce rolling comforts and at the same time leave the plant worker in a hopelessly mean and stressing job. The new Volvo plant in Kalmar is an example of that. You can not rear pupils for democracy and golden opportunities and at the same time maintain an education which is an interminable and non-committing knowledge drill. The experimental college (forsøgsgymnas) is one of the first rebels against that system. And you can not provide patients with the most advanced medical care and let nurses sacrifice themselves to an underpaid calling.

But an ideology must be clearly and precisely formulated to be effective. It is necessary to understand how it

relates to the concrete details of what we are doing if it shall have effects. And this is where sociology comes to our aid. (See for example the goal specifications for Shell in Hill's excellent book. Hill, 1972 pp 55-59). It is this, inter alia, which gives the new training systems such as sensitivity training their appeal. Hence their extensive (but also inadequate) use in connection with organization development. But there are limits to what this and other expensive methods can hoard of ideological pressure.

Relationship with External Environment

Changes in the power structure of companies are followed with concern by management and workers respectively. Autocratic shipowners are good copy in the press, radio and TV. So are shipowners who give their company to their employees. Politicians and the general public nearly jump out of their skin when similar changes occur within the educational system. Internal conditions in labor organizations may be ruled by external forces to such degree that many believe it is impossible to pursue real organization development without extensive political changes in the society.

The Norwegian cooperation experiments under auspices of the Confederation of Trade Unions and the Employers Association are an example of how alliance with external forces came to play a decisive role in pioneer projects. (One can not say that the same support has been given for dissemination of the data).

A strategy designed to secure against setbacks by building up support in the established power machinery in the external environment of an organization which desire change is one thing. It is hardly as necessary in the society today as it was some year back. Another thing is whether the organization development could bring about conditions in companies, schools, hospitals, governmental institutions

etc. which would weaken the capacity of these organizations for survival and performance of their functions in the society. Systems which are unsound internally may perhaps be sound externally?

For example, it is conceivable that an all-powerfull - and preferably efficient - top management is a necessary evil in an economic climate marked by war and ruthless competition. (Bass (1967) observed that groups which had undergone sensitivity training were considerably less successfull in a business deal than groups which had not had this training, because, Bass maintains, the members of the group had become too uncritical of one another and accepted each other's proposals out of pure goodness and goodwill. A number of other systems which restrict the opportunities of the individual for participation are also considered insurmountable obstacles by persons whose vote carries decisive weight.

The future will probably bring a number of new delimitations. It is not always easy to determine how much of the argumentation is due to established traditions, covert power struggle or simply lack of ingenuity. Some Israeli companies have let executive jobs rotate, and did not lose by this system, far from it in fact. The Chinese also appear to practice a system which permit executives to work as ordinary workers for one to three months a year - a system which an exceptional number of Norwegians have referred to with great sympathy. One is tempted to ask: Who will be the first in the field in Norway?

What is Organization Development?

From the foregoing we see that people will not get their human conditions improved unless the changes embrace all major aspects of the organization. It is inadequate merely to try to improve human relationships if the work planning

does not make cooperation natural. It is no good unless efforts to promote cooperation and equally include changes in the power structure which demonstrate that the cooperation and equally are based on real and natural presuppositions, that the democracy is not merely make-believe. It is no good unless structural and technological changes are supported by training and development of the individual and absorption in the ideology which is the basis for the changes. It is no good unless internal changes in an organization are designed to secure the maintaining of a vital communication with the sections of the external environment it is dependent upon. In fact, in that case the improvements the organization endeavors to bring about will not have sufficient foothold in the parts of the organization where the improvements are to be kept alive.

Therefore, cooperation training as a rule has only ideological, not practical effects. Therefore, cooperation organs do not alter the actual power structure. Therefore, programs for "management by objectives" may fail if one tries to introduce them in power or role-oriented organizations. And the person-oriented career discussions will largely be idle chatter if changes in job-satisfaction are ignored.

Organization development means action which secures for all members of an organization adequate terms for sound and all-round cooperations (participation). The "optimalization" must take place simultaneously in social and technical systems - i.e. as an overall (if stepwise) improvement of working, structural, ideological and cooperative aspects of the activity. And - naturally - so that the necessary interplay with the external environment is maintained.

What kind of action is usually listed under the headline organization development? In the following you will find a survey of the methods most commonly used, and an evaluation of their estimated effect on ideology, technology, structure and cooperation.

A quick perusal will show that OD has been most efficient as regards finding ways to influence the ideology and cooperation system, least efficient in influencing the organizational structure and individual enrichment through deeper job satisfaction. Curiously enough - at a time of such rapid technological development and an almost equally explosive formation of labor organizations.

The methods that are listed need not and should definitely not be applied isolatedly. Nor should they be applied helter-skelter, as is unfortunately often the case. I know there are consultants and adherents who find it pretentious that I have defined organization development as a simultaneous "optimalization". Many have told me that you scare many industrial leaders with such definitions and that it is better to tread quietly and pretend it is merely a matter of minor, interesting activities which make people cooperate better. But experience contradicts such tactical diplomatic course.

Organization development is also developing. Its initial stage was largely inter conferences where a dormant cooperation was activized. But organizations are systems which you learn to know only when you are trying to change them. It has eventually become clear that the methods which were applied were too naive. The current dilemma is where to concentrate the efforts most: on technical expertise or the need to work out tools that people in the organizations can employ. At the present time, that is the major need which must be met before the development in progress can become sufficiently exhaustive and widely used. Industrial humanism - for that is what organization development is - requires the ingenious industrial drive to succeed. If not, the outlook is dim.

Concluding Note

Some readers may regret that I have said little or nothing about increased productivity, greater efficiency, more flexible adaptability, higher profits and lower costs as a result of organization development. Such results have been observed after a time in greater or lesser degree as development projects have progressed. Many a company executive will feel relieved to hear that. And many a subordinate will wonder whether organization development is a smart new method to force up the pace. What both parties should know is this: Organization development does not resolve the problem of what to devote the greatest attention to - human or economic needs. But it brings in fresh possibilities for solutions which are in keeping with our knowledge in the area of organization, and in keeping with what we in our time see as legitimate human rights.

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OD-PROJECTS AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE ORGANIZATION

TRAINING		ORGANIZATION IDEOLOGY	SOCIAL SYSTEM	PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGY	ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE
OD-PROJECTS					
Sensitivity Training	Increased person-Orientation	Certain Capacity to Take up delicate Issues	None	None	None
Group-dynamic Training	Strengthens Task-Orientation	Tendency to increase Meeting Activity	None	None	None
Opinion polls and other broad surveys	Show up Imbalances and increase pressure for changes, may furnish some suggestions	Can increase cooperation on development projects if all are active in processing of data	None	None	None
Sociotechnical analysis such as variation analysis, role analysis etc.	Increase task-orientation and pressure for changes technology and structure	Can reveal non-human causes of imbalance in the social system	Can furnish vital information and ideas for changes	Can give incentive for modifications	
Goal-setting discussions	Can increase task-orientation if discussion is free and open	Can stimulate cooperation on central tasks	None	None	

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PARTICIPATION		DECENTRALIZATION		COORDINATION PROJECTS	
Team development of leader and operator groups	Weaken power- and role orientation and strengthen task- and person-orientation	Intensify cooperation on development project in an open manner	Can reshuffle division of tasks and increase use of group decisions	None	
Individual career planning, development discussions	Increased task-orientation	Improve communication between executives and subordinates individually	None	None	
Management by objectives	Increased task-orientation	Can ease authoritarian pressure	Can increase selection freedom in work methods	None	
Job development	Can increase task-orientation	Increase individual independence	Enriches the individual job technologically	A certain decentralization of decision and control	
Establishment of autonomous groups	Increased task-orientation	Better mutuality and fellowship on working level	Extends the scope of the individual's participation in all work operations Improves information system	Creates mini-democracies and changes central control	
Establishment of cooperation organs, election of representatives for boards etc.	Increased role-orientation the main emphasis being placed on the issue involved	Dubious	None	Special organs for cooperation, or none	